

# Rhodora

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## PINUS BANKSIANA ON NANTUCKET.

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IN the interest of geographic botany a further word should be said in the matter of *Pinus Banksiana* on Nantucket as reported by Professor Harshberger in RHODORA, 16: 184. The identity of the trees is not at all in question. The record rests on unquestioned authority, and I myself, a number of years ago, observed their little group in thriving growth at the locality described by Professor Harshberger. What has been their history there? For two reasons it would be a very notable thing were the Labrador pine by native right a member of the Nantucket flora. It would be very notable because of the wide severance from its present well defined natural range by which a remote northern tree had a place in the vegetation of Massachusetts and of southern New England; and it would be scarcely less a matter of botanical interest in its contradiction of a pronouncement of local history that Nantucket was originally a pineless island — originally, for it has never been questioned that the pitch pines, now so conspicuous a feature of the island's vegetation are not of native Nantucket ancestry. Mrs. Owen, writing in 1888, does not hesitate to say "The pines are all from seed planted by Joseph Sturgis and others in 1847 and following years."

The Labrador pines grow in a part of the island long ago explored by botanists, and close to the old Wauwinet road. It would be against the presumption that they had always grown there that so conspicuous a tree as a conifer, and so remarkable a thing as a colony of pine trees on Nantucket in the days before any pines were known to grow there, had failed of discovery by those earlier investigators.



It may be presumed that Doctor Harshberger, when he made his discovery, was limited to only a very hasty survey of the surroundings. His experienced eye in matters of plant association could not otherwise have failed to note in nearby community with the Labrador pines other conifers even more widely divorced from their natural habitats. *Pinus sylvestris* of northern Europe is there, and *Pinus massoniana* of China, growing among the native thickets, and with them are examples of our northern *Picea canadensis*, and the Rocky Mountain *Picea pungens*, besides, I am quite sure, other evergreens not now clearly recalled, as well as several kinds of exotic deciduous trees, all of which, including the Labrador pines have long been listed in nurseryman's catalogues. The largest of the Labrador pines are quite obviously of no greater age than their associates from other climes, and their group, which includes some smaller trees that must have sprung up naturally from seed, is doubtless of contemporary origin with a conspicuous and now well-matured and too closely grown planting of ornamental evergreens that tell their own tale. And their story may be amplified. A life long resident of the island gave me the information that, many years before, someone, whose name I had then no care to note, having an interest in that part of the island and in trees as well, planted there a large number of different kinds of trees, especially evergreens. My informant had it that a hundred different kinds had been set out there, although I saw no evidence of any quite so ambitious an attempt at arboriculture. I recall that some of these trees were being sacrificed to the construction of a tennis court which, as laid out, would separate the Labrador pines from the group of larger species, thus giving them a sort of isolation and appearance of nativity.

It may be not impossible that the group of trees described by Professor Harshberger is not identical with the one known to me. I do not, indeed, seem to recognize his wind swept trees near an ocean bluff. But the bluff, or low bank such as it is at Wauwinet, is at no great distance, and if there are really two groups of these pines their source of origin can scarcely have been other than the same. It does not seem to follow that any great phytogeographical import can attach to the fact that the Labrador pine grows on Nantucket, or that its presence there affords any just grounds for speculation on the mysteries of plant distribution.

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